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## Lodi Unified School District trustees prioritize \$15 million in cuts



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### Budget schedule

**May 17:** Regular school board meeting. Community members may speak during the section set aside on the agenda for public comments.

**June 7:** Trustees are expected to receive their first look at the budget document for the 2011-12 school year.

**June 21:** Budget adoption scheduled following official public hearing.

**June 30:** Deadline district's budget must be submitted to the San Joaquin County Office of Education. — News-Sentinel staff

Posted: Monday, May 9, 2011 12:00 am | Updated: 5:58 am, Wed May 11, 2011.

By **Jennifer Bonnett**  
News-Sentinel Staff Writer | [2 comments](#)

Lodi Unified School District trustees spent an entire day Saturday prioritizing more than \$15 million in cuts for the 2011-12 school year.

Recommendations came from employees, community members and the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee, and the school board was given the task of sorting through them.

The session was new for the district and a

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brain child of board president George Neely, who said there hasn't been enough time for trustees in the past to provide staff direction before the annual budget is prepared.

On Saturday, he planned not only to have the board prioritize recommendations, but find ongoing cuts "so we can get off this layoff merry-go-round we seem to be stuck on," Neely said.

The district is facing its third straight year of unprecedented personnel and program

reductions. An estimated \$15 million is needed.

Chief Business Officer Tim Hern faults the economy, especially when it comes to \$2 million in lost revenue through a decline in enrollment this year.

"There are going to be a lot of cuts that need to be made, some of which I don't want," trustee Ron Heberle said. "It's not because I don't like 'x,' but it's because it's a lower priority and keeps cuts away from the classroom."

Fellow trustee and retired teacher Ruth Davis agreed that she took into account the effect on students when making her priorities.

Among the most discussed programs by trustees:

### **Make sports self-supporting by fundraising**

Instead of eliminating all co-curricular activities at a cost savings close to \$800,000 or choosing which specific sports or grade levels will be offered, trustees gave direction to reduce the expense by 10 percent with a possible 20-percent cut the next school year.

"We would not be able to function," said trustee Joe Nava, himself a former high school athletic director. "It's a very drastic measure to go into fundraising alone."

Davis, however, took issue with what she feels is a disparity between the amount of money spent in the classroom compared to the amount on each co-curricular student, an estimated \$332 each, she said.

"That's more than we spend on a child's education in the classroom. Sports are important, but they are not the end-all, be-all to education."

Heberle agreed. "I see sports as a service to students, but really the bottom line is

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(students) are here for an education, not prep sports," he said.

The reductions will be split among all of the schools with co-curricular activities — which includes not only sports but band and speech and debate — and allow sites to make their own determination on specific cuts.

### **Eliminate benchmark examinations**

Although at least one trustee believes students are over-assessed, the board majority decided saving \$35,000 annually was not worth eliminating all four of the annual assessments.

Four trustees gave direction to keep the funding in the budget.

### **Close swimming pools**

Trustees agreed to keep all four high school swimming pools open at an annual approximate cost of \$444,000 partly because closing them would eliminate any revenue generated by organizations that currently pay to use them. Additionally, there would still be a cost to maintain them even if they're not being used.

### **Cut salaries of those who earn \$120,000 or more by 5 percent**

Because they've volunteered for across-the-board salary-related cuts in the past, trustees gave direction to re-approach these employees to ask for a consensus.

The board, however, is not clear exactly which employees this will affect. A report is expected at the next board meeting.

Neely said a 2-percent cut would save the district about \$37,000.

### **Reduce supplemental hourly programs**

Trustees agreed to halve the budget that pays for a specific afterschool program.

Approximately \$900,000 will likely be eliminated for services such as working with high school seniors close to completing graduation requirements, or new students enrolling in school for the first time at age 10 who do not know how to hold a pencil, for example.

### **Reduce adult education programs**

Given the direction of trustees, the program will have to operate on a third of its current budget next school year. Principal Bill Atterberry is not clear what the cuts will entail.

Neely praised the adult education programs, but said that's not what the district is primarily for.



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"We've got to change things and retrench and refocus on our mission, and that's to educate our children," he said.

Trustees also prioritized — but did not rank — which positions they would like restored if additional money is identified. Those positions, which already received pink slips through board action earlier this calendar year, include:

- Librarians at the secondary level.
- Vice and assistant principals at the middle school, high school and adult education levels.
- K-12 psychologist and two nurses.
- Teachers at all grade levels to concentrate on class-size reductions.

The seven hour-plus discussion identified more than \$15 million in cuts and received accolades from audience members for what they termed trustees' transparency.

"It's a new day, a new time, and we have to do things in a different way," trustee Ken Davis said, recognizing the meeting was a first in his 20 years on the board. "I've never seen us get this far this early."

Contact reporter Jennifer Bonnett at [jenniferb@lodinews.com](mailto:jenniferb@lodinews.com).

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